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(11)

EP 0 896 813 A2

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
17.02.1999 Bulletin 1999/07

(51) Int. Cl.⁶: **A61F 2/06**, A61F 2/08,
A61F 2/24

(21) Application number: **98115134.3**

(22) Date of filing: **12.08.1998**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE**
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

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(30) Priority: **13.08.1997 IT TO970743**

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(54) **An element for anchoring an implant device in place**

(57) The anchorage element (3) includes a body made of shape memory material which, on reaching a transition temperature, passes from a generally retracted position with respect to the associated implant device (1) to an expanded position in which the element (3) anchors the device (1) to the implant site.

FIG. 1

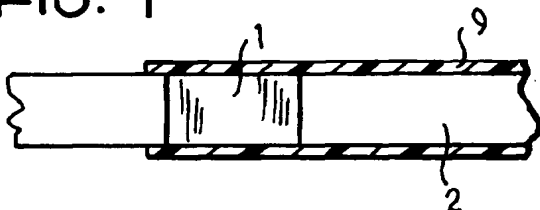
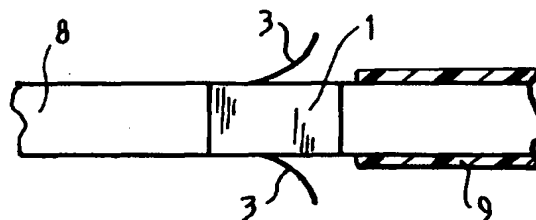


FIG. 2



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Description

[0001] The present invention concerns elements for anchoring implant devices in place.

[0002] The invention has been developed with particular attention to its possible application to the anchorage in place of implant devices such as electrodes for endocardial stimulation or drug delivery devices. The invention can nevertheless be used for the anchorage in place of a wide range of implant devices: some possible examples include vascular grafts, stents for angioplasty, various kinds of prosthetic cardiac valves, etc.

[0003] Various arrangements have been proposed and utilised in order to anchor implant devices firmly in place, from suturing (consider, for example, the attachment of prosthetic cardiac valves), to retention effected by the expansion of the device in situ (one typically thinks of stents for angioplasty), to the deployment of mechanical attachment elements.

[0004] All of these above-described arrangements have greater or lesser disadvantages.

[0005] Attachment by means of suturing nearly always requires accessibility to the implant site from the outside and it is therefore practical only during surgery. Anchorage by way of expansion in situ carries the risk of the subsequent collapse of the device and is therefore practical only where particular conditions exist for the geometric coupling between the device and the associated implant site. Even mechanical attachment such as that utilised, for example, for pacemaker electrodes, often requires direct access to the implant site from the outside. Where implantation is preceded, for example, by catheterisation, the risk exists that attachment may occur before the device has reached the desired implantation site, locking the device itself in an undesirable position, when it can often be dangerous, if not impossible, to remove or reposition it.

[0006] The object of the present invention is to provide a solution which overcomes in radical manner the disadvantages described above.

[0007] According to the present invention, this object is achieved by virtue of an attachment element for implant devices having the characteristics specified in the following claims.

[0008] The invention will now be described, purely by way of non-limitative example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

- Figures 1 and 2 show schematically the application of an anchorage element according to the invention to a first implant device;
- Figures 3 and 4 schematically illustrates the application of another anchorage element according to the invention to a different implant device; and
- Figure 5 is a view on an enlarged scale of the part indicated by the arrow V in Figure 4.

[0009] In Figures 1 and 2, the reference numeral 1

illustrates schematically an implant device constituted, in the embodiment illustrated - which is by way of example and must not therefore be interpreted as limiting the scope of the invention - by an electrode intended to be implanted in the body of a patient. This may be, for example, a stimulation and/or detection electrode in a cardiac stimulation system (a pacemaker or defibrillator, for example). Alternatively, it could be a completely different type of implant device such as, for example, a drug dispenser or an element for attaching a vascular graft.

[0010] Specifically, the device 1 is intended to be put in place by catheterisation and, to this end, it is mounted (according to well-known criteria) on an introduction catheter 2 (of widely known type).

[0011] Thus, as can be seen more clearly in Figure 2, the device 1 has at least one or, preferably, at least two associated attachment members 3, each constituted (completely as in the embodiment illustrated, or partly, for example, in the base only) by a kind of finger 3 capable of moving from a retracted or concealed position (illustrated in Figure 1) in which, in practice, the elements 3 do not project beyond the contour of the device 1/catheter 2 assembly, to an expanded position (illustrated in Figure 2) in which the fingers 3 project from the sides of the device 1. It is therefore clear that when the elements 3 are retracted, the device 1 can be introduced into a patient's body, usually endovenously, and moved using the catheter until it reaches the implant site. The elements 3 can then be expanded in order to retain the device 1 at the implant site in a general arrangement which can be defined as an anchor, or even better, as an arrow head or fish hook.

[0012] Figures 3 to 5 illustrate another implant device, also indicated 1 (but nevertheless capable assuming the form of a different kind of implant device: in relation to this, reference should be made to the above description of the device illustrated in Figures 1 and 2) and located at the distal end of an associated catheter 2, this also being of known type.

[0013] In this case, the anchorage element, indicated 4, is constituted by a kind of spring which, starting from a folded or concealed position (illustrated in Figure 3) in which the element 4 does not project beyond the profile of the distal end of the device 1/catheter 2 assembly, is capable of moving to an expanded position (illustrated in Figure 4) in which the element 4 projects forward from the aforesaid distal end in a general arrangement which may be described as the end of a corkscrew or pig tail: it is therefore an arrangement adopted in many mechanical attachment devices of the type used, for example, in pacemaker electrodes.

[0014] Passing from the retracted or concealed position (Figures 1 and 3) to the expanded position (shown in Figures 2 and 4) is achieved according to the invention by virtue of a shape memory mechanism.

[0015] The physical mechanism known as a "shape memory" is widely known in the art and has been used

for various purposes over a long time. In particular, numerous metal materials exist, for example, alloys based on the material known commercially as Nitinol (constituted essentially by nickel and titanium) that are capable of employing this mechanism: in practice, a body made from a shape memory material initially has a certain geometry or shape; on reaching a predetermined transition temperature (which can be by way of heating or possibly cooling), the material "remembers" that it can assume a different shape, and the body changes its geometry. In the specific embodiment illustrated by way of example, the elements 3 and 4 are formed such that they initially present the retracted shape (Figures 1 and 3) as long as they are kept below a predetermined temperature level at which they are able (by the effect of the shape memory mechanism upon reaching the aforesaid transition temperature) to move into the expanded configuration (Figures 2 and 4).

[0016] This result may be achieved in various ways.

[0017] For example, as illustrated schematically in Figure 5, a heating device such as, for example, an electric resistor 6 may be provided inside the element 4. This resistor may be supplied by associated service wires 7 which pass along the catheter 2 to connect with the heating element in the element 4 by means of associated connectors 8. Once the locating operation has been completed, that is, after the device 1 has been taken to the desired position with the anchorage element 4 in the retracted position, the element 4 itself is heated to take it to the transition temperature and thus to pass to the expanded position so as to anchor the device 1 firmly to the implant site, for example, by "screwing" it to the surrounding tissues. This latter is effected by acting on the catheter 2 to cause an axial rotation of the device 1.

[0018] The catheter 2 may then be removed (according to known criteria) by disengaging it from the device 1 which remains in place, held by the element 4.

[0019] Due to this movement, the connectors 8 disengage from the heating element 6, disconnecting it from the associated service wires 7.

[0020] Naturally, this is one of many possible solutions. In particular, in some applications, the catheter may remain permanently implanted, for example, to enable electrostimulation and/or the delivery of drugs.

[0021] As has already been said, the shape memory mechanism may be primed, at least in theory, by cooling the elements 3 or 4. It follows that the heating resistor can be substituted by a cooling element such as, for example, an element having a Peltier effect, capable of cooling the element 3 or 4 in question until it reaches the temperature at which the element itself passes into the expanded position.

[0022] For other reasons, it is not strictly necessary that the temperature control element (whether a heating element such as the resistor 6, or a cooling element) also extends into the element 4. In order to achieve the necessary temperature control (heating or cooling), it is

also possible to operate using an element associated with the distal end of the catheter 2 and capable of transferring the heat generated thereby to the element 4.

[0023] The desired expansion of the element 3 or 4 following the temperature control thereof can also be achieved without recourse to a positive action induced from the outside.

[0024] For example, the desired heating effect and expansion of the element 3, 4 can be achieved simply by exposing the element 3, 4 to the heat of the human body: in this case, it is of course important to ensure that the transition temperature at which the aforesaid shape memory mechanism operates coincides with the typical temperature of the human body (approximately 36-37°C).

[0025] It is worth noting that when the thermal action of the human body is used in order to achieve the heating effect and the expansion of the element 3, 4, direct action must be taken in order to avoid the elements 3 or 4 expanding before the device 1 has reached the implant site.

[0026] One solution for avoiding this disadvantage is, for example, that of providing a mechanism which is intended to hold the elements 3, 4 in the retracted position until they reach the implant site where they are subsequently disengaged.

[0027] For example, Figures 1 and 2 show schematically an arrangement in which the aforesaid containment means for elements 3 are simply a kind of tubular sheath or covering 9 fitted over the catheter 2 with the ability to slide longitudinally between an initial position for the insertion and positioning of the device 1 (which position is represented in Figure 1), in which the distal end of the covering 9 surrounds the device 1, withstanding and thus preventing the expansion of the elements 3, and a final position (shown in Figure 2) in which, by sliding back along the body of the catheter 2 with a movement which can be controlled from the outside by the person operating the catheter, the covering 9 disengages the device 1, enabling the elements 3 to expand.

[0028] In addition or as an alternative, at least in part, to a mechanical containment action such as that described above, the covering 9 may be such as to have a heat insulating effect on the elements 3 (for example, due to the thermal insulation quality of the material forming at least the part intended to engage the elements 3) which are only seen when the covering 9 is withdrawn.

[0029] These are, of course, just some of the possible arrangements that can be adopted in order to achieve the desired result.

[0030] It can also be hypothesised, at least for devices 1 not intended for deep implantation in the human body (although the method is applicable, at least in theory, to all implant devices), to effect the insertion and positioning of the device 1 at the implant site by maintaining the patient in a state of hypothermia limited at least to path

along which the device 1 is introduced. The normal thermal regime is then allowed to reestablish once the device 1 has reached the implant site, with the consequent expansion of the anchorage element 3, 4 due to the thermal action of the human body.

[0031] Naturally, the principle of the invention remaining the same, the details of manufacture and the embodiments may be widely varied with respect to those described and illustrated without by this departing from the ambit of the present invention. In particular, the anchorage element or elements 3, 4 may be configured so as to act, in addition to the anchoring affect, for example, as an electrode (for example for stimulation and/or sensing), or as a conduit for the delivery of drugs.

Claims

1. An element (3, 4) for anchoring implant devices (1) in place, characterised in that the said element is constituted, at least partly, by shape memory material so that the said element is capable of passing, on reaching a transition temperature, from a substantially retracted position with respect to the associated implant device (1) to an expanded position in which the element (3, 4) itself is capable of anchoring the said device (1) to the implant site.
2. An element according to Claim 1, characterised in that the said material is a shape memory material which reaches the said transition temperature on being heated to the said transition temperature.
3. An element according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, characterised in that the said transition temperature corresponds substantially to the temperature of the human body.
4. An element according to Claim 3, characterised in that it has associated containment means (9) for preventing the element (3, 4) itself from passing from the said substantially retracted position to the said expanded position on exposure of the said shape memory material to the temperature of the human body during the insertion of the device (1) towards the implant site.
5. An element according to Claim 3 or Claim 4, characterised in that it has associated thermal insulation means (9) for insulating the said shape memory material from the temperature of the human body during the insertion of the device (1) towards the implant site.
6. An element according to Claim 4 or Claim 5, characterised in that the said implant device (1) has an associated introduction catheter (2), and in that associated with the said anchorage element (3, 4) is a sheath or covering (9) over the said catheter and movable between a containment position in which the sheath or covering (9) itself engages the said element (3), and a retracted position in which the said sheath or covering (9) disengages the said element (3), thereby releasing it.
7. An element according to Claim 5 and Claim 6, characterised in that at least the part of the said sheath or covering (9) capable of engaging the said element is made of thermal insulation material.
8. An element according to any preceding claim, characterised in that the element (3, 4) itself carries associated temperature control means (6).
9. An element according to Claim 6, characterised in that the said positive temperature control means comprise an electric resistor (6).
10. An element according to Claim 8 or Claim 9, characterised in that the said temperature control means (6) extend at least partly into the said element.
11. An element according to Claim 8 or Claim 9, characterised in that the said temperature control means are generally outside the said element (4).
12. An element according to any preceding claim, characterised in that it has a general hook-like configuration, at least in the expanded position.
13. An element according to Claim 12, characterised in that the said element (3) is associated with the related implant device (1) in the form of a pair of corresponding anchorage elements which, in the extended position, extend from the associated implant device (1) in a general arrow head-like configuration.
14. An element according to any of Claims 1 to 11, characterised in that, at least in the said expanded position, the element (4) has a general corkscrew or pig-tail-like conformation.
15. An element according to any of Claims 1 to 14, in the form of an electrode.
16. An element according to any of Claims 1 to 15, in the form of drug delivery means.

FIG. 1

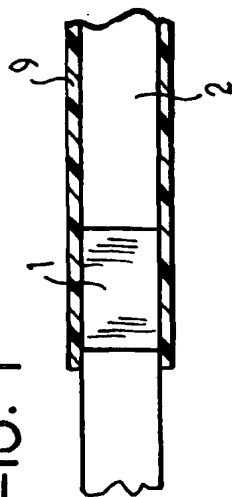


FIG. 2

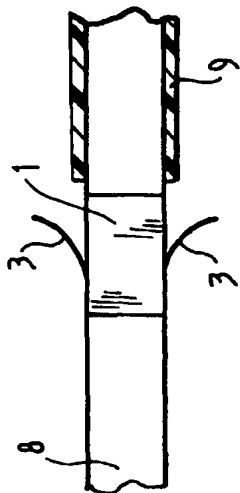


FIG. 3

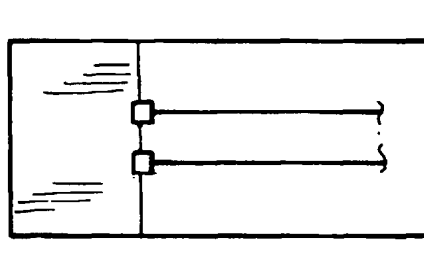


FIG. 4

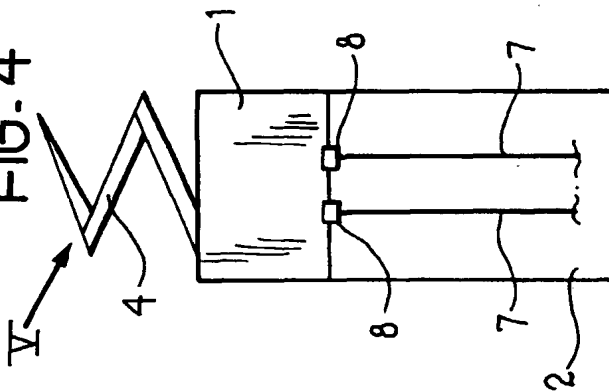


FIG. 5

